

The American Renaissance

Renaissance = rebirth

- I. Transcendentalism
 - a. The idea that in determining the ultimate reality of God, the universe, the self, and other important matters, one must transcend, or go beyond, everyday human experience in the physical world.
 - b. Intuition is an important tool for discovering truth.
 - c. Like idealists
 - i. Idealists – true reality involved ideas rather than the world as perceived by the senses.
 - ii. Idealists – sought the permanent reality that underlay physical appearances.
 - iii. Transcendentalists – idealists, but in a broader, more practical sense
 - d. Influence
 - i. Emerson, also Thoreau
 - 1. Most influential and best-known member
 - ii. Grafted from ideas from Europe & Asia
 - iii. American roots included: Puritan thought, beliefs of the 18th century religious revivalist Jonathan Edwards, and the Romantic tradition exemplified by William Cullen Bryant
 - e. Outlook
 - i. Nature as a doorway to a mystical world holding important truths
 - ii. Intuition is our capacity to know things spontaneously and immediately through our emotions rather than through our reasoning abilities
 - iii. Optimism
 - iv. God is good, and God works through nature.
 - v. Trust ourselves – trust in the power each of us has to know God directly – then we will realize that each of us is also part of the Divine Soul, the source of all good.
 - f. Dark Romantics
 - i. Hawthorne, Melville, Poe
 - ii. Valued intuition over logic and reason.
 - iii. Saw signs and symbols in human events (like Puritans)
 - iv. Disagreed with the fact that nature was good or harmless
 - v. Explored the conflict between good & evil, the psychological effects of guilt and sin, and even madness and derangement in the human psyche.
 - vi. Saw the blankness and horror of evil